

South Eastern and London
Counties Association for
the Blind

REPORT OF MEETING FOR HOME
TEACHERS AND HOME VISITORS

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South Eastern and London
Counties Association for the Blind.

REPORT OF
MEETING FOR HOME TEACHERS AND
HOME VISITORS.

held at CLOTHWORKERS' HALL, LONDON,

on MONDAY, JULY 6th, 1931

Further copies can be obtained from the Secretary to the Association
at 66, Victoria Street, London, S.W. 1.

REPORT OF MEETING FOR HOME TEACHERS AND HOME VISITORS.

By the kindness of the Clothworkers' Company, a Meeting for Home Teachers and Home Visitors in the south eastern area was held at Clothworkers' Hall on Monday, July 6th, 1931, at 2.15 p.m.

The Chairman presided, although he was obliged by another duty to arrive late. In his absence at the opening of the Meeting, the Secretary welcomed the Home Teachers and Home Visitors present and expressed the hope that they would all find something to encourage them in their work and to give them new ideas to improve it.

Miss Jean Robinson then spoke on

Guiding for the Blind.

She said that two camps for Blind Post Guides had just been struck, and that one on the Woodlark Site near Farnham, for Guides in the south eastern area, was being pitched to-day. She described a typical day in camp, beginning with a 7.30 rise, then breakfast, washing up, any necessary treatment by the trained nurse, bed-making, then the Court of Honour, which considered suggestions and decided the day's programme, then colours were hoisted. Prayers followed. Training, badge-work, and games filled in the time until dinner, a bumper dinner of stews or roast joints, vegetables, and puddings, always light. After dinner the rest hour, which everyone soon learnt to welcome after the fresh air and plenty to do. Then free time for reading, writing, "hiking", motor excursions, and so on. After tea, more free time or games, country dancing, etc. Then a lightish supper, and afterwards "camp fire", round which songs were sung and stories told, grave and gay, and lastly "Taps" was sung:

" Day is done ;
Gone the sun
From the sea, from the hills, from the sky ;
All is well ;
Safely rest ;
God is nigh."

After that hot drinks and a big wash (which took a surprisingly long time, about twice as much accommodation having to be provided as at ordinary camps) and bed. There were not many camp rules, only those really necessary for the good of all, such as silence during part of the rest hour and late at night. Everyone must be passed fit for camp by a doctor. Those therefore who

went to camp were the strongest among the Post Guides. The Post Guides were recruited largely from those technically classified as "unemployable", but any who could not join Institution Companies were eligible. They were scattered about and cannot often meet, so they were linked together by the Company Letter or Journal. This contained a letter from the Captain and Lieutenant, articles on matters of interest, letters telling other people's doings, etc. It was in Braille and was passed round by post. Guides were asked to keep it not longer than four days, as the news got stale.

Guiding made Blind people feel they were part of a world movement. When possible they tried to attach their Post Guides to sighted companies, so that they could join in many of their activities and mix with other people, and even if they were bedridden, a sighted Ranger could often visit them.

Miss Robinson then suggested that for those who lose their sight and for those who have never seen, mental loneliness was usually the worst trouble. How were their problems to be faced? Not by treating blindness as an affliction, not as an excuse to "show off" how clever they were in spite of blindness, nor as a reason for hiding away in shame. The best thing to do was to take hold of it with both hands and use it. It might give real opportunities for helping other people. Of all the things from which people suffer, blindness was the most humorous. Such funny things happened, for instance, when you took the cake instead of the slice, when you asked your way of a horse, and apologised to a cow for bumping into her.

How could Home Teachers help? If the Captain as a stranger first approached a possible recruit and asked if she would like to join the Guides, the reply would almost certainly be "No, thank you very much". The Home Teacher, being the friend of both, could pave the way and tell of the Post Guides she knew, the things they do, the Letter, Camp and so on, and suggest that it would be nice to do them too. Then, when the Captain came, she would not come as a stranger. If anyone feared that Guiding would be beyond her, the Captain would go through the Law and the Promise, which anyone could try to keep, however handicapped. Uniform need present no difficulty. It was not compulsory for Post Guides, though those who wore it were proud of it. The idea of marching need cause no alarm, for Post Guides do practically none. As for age—well, the age limit was 81 and might be extended! It would of course be fatal for the Home Teacher or Captain to say in a starchy voice that a form must be filled in, but no one would object if it were introduced as a necessary detail. The doctor's certificate that a recruit was free from any infectious complaint was a very necessary preliminary to receiving the Company Letter. This too nobody would mind if it were required as a matter of course.

It was not very often that Blind people had the opportunity of helping others, but in Guiding this came as second nature.

Miss Robinson then gave an invitation to the Open Day at the Camp at Woodlark Site, Farnham, on Saturday, July 11th. She added that the most welcome help anyone could give would be the winning of more recruits.

After hearty applause, questions were invited. When asked about sleeping tents, she explained that those with a little sight usually shared tents with the blind, but the sighted ones did not.

Miss Robinson explained that practically all Blind Post Guides were Rangers, that is, senior Guides over 16. Younger Blind girls were nearly always in Schools, in many of which there were non-post Companies.

Asked about the financial side, she said that each Ranger paid 1s. a day and each Guider 2s. a day while in camp. This had so far covered the cost of maintenance. Visitors were asked to pay 6d. for meals.

Asked if those unable to read Braille could get the Company Letter in script, she said that the Midlands did transcribe it and circulate it in script, and this could if necessary be done by anyone. It was suggested that another Blind person could be enlisted to read it from Braille to the Guide until she could read it for herself. This would be a good way of spreading interest in the movement and was much better than waiting for the Home Teacher to come and read it, which might delay the Letter for the whole Patrol. It should never be kept by anyone for more than four days.

The addresses of the Captains of the Blind Post Companies in the different parts of the south eastern area are:—

London	Miss Munday,
	14, Rosecroft Avenue,
	Hampstead, N.W.3.

Essex	}	Miss Robinson,
Herts		
Middlesex		
		Burford,
		West Byfleet, Surrey.

Berks	}	Miss Dyer,
Hants		
Sussex		
		38, Kirby Road,
		North End, Portsmouth.

	}	Miss Graham,
Kent		
Surrey		
		Hollingden,
		Woldingham,
		Caterham Valley, Surrey.

Asked the exact terms of the Guide Law and Promise, Miss Robinson gave them as follows:—

A Guide at her Enrolment promises on her honour to do her best—

1. To do her duty to God and the King.
2. To help other people at all times.
3. To obey the Guide Law.

A Ranger's special responsibility is

To render service by taking this Promise out into a wider world.

THE GUIDE LAW.

1. A Guide's honour is to be trusted.
2. A Guide is loyal.
3. A Guide's duty is to be useful and to help others.
4. A Guide is a friend to all.
5. A Guide is courteous (polite).
6. A Guide is a friend to animals.
7. A Guide obeys orders.
8. A Guide smiles and sings under all difficulties.
9. A Guide is thrifty (does not waste).
10. A Guide is pure in thought, word and deed.

Miss Ainsworth then read a paper on the subject of

Social Clubs for the Blind.

Some people hold that there should not be Clubs for the Blind.

In times past there was a tendency still showing to-day to treat the Blind as also mentally deficient.

We are still fighting that tendency. We keep urging that the Blind are not necessarily mentally deficient, but are normal people and must lead normal lives.

By that we mean, not that blindness should be ignored or denied, but that in all respects save in the matter of sight the Blind are equal with the Sighted.

What we do not hold is that the Blind should be treated exactly as the Sighted. That would be neither a sane nor a true point of view. If we believed it—we should not teach Braille or Moon, for the Sighted read with their eyes not their fingers. Neither should we help a Blind man across the street. We should let him find his own way through the traffic.

Now the people who hold that there should not be Clubs for the Blind think that to form Clubs for them is not treating them normally, but emphasizing their blindness.

They entirely ignore the fact that it is quite normal for people with common interests to meet together.

You yourselves have met together this afternoon not to emphasize the fact that you are Home Teachers but being normal people you want to hear what others in your sphere of work are doing.

We know that where two or three golfers or fishermen are gathered together they will sooner or later talk their own particular kind of shop. People with interests in common invariably discuss them. So it is quite normal for people with such a big thing as blindness in common to want to meet together.

Again people say:—Let the Blind join other Clubs of which the Sighted are equally members.

By all means. But the greater the strength of the common bond the livelier the interest. I can give you a case in point where a young woman is a member both of a Blind Club and of the Y.W.C.A. She very seldom goes to the Y.W.C.A., but she is regular in her attendance at the Blind Club because she has so much more in common with the other members.

Others will say:—The Blind ought not to form little bands by themselves—in other words they should not keep themselves to themselves. This is precisely what Blind Clubs are trying to prevent. They are bringing the Blind and the Sighted into touch with one another and joining little isolated units of Blind people to form friendships with one another.

Clubs also help the Blind. If I lost a limb it would be of the greatest help and value to me to meet someone in like condition if only to see how he overcame his difficulty.

Why do invalids discuss their symptoms with one another? Primarily to get tips from one another.

We sighted people, even those of the strongest sympathy and the most vivid imagination, cannot help the Blind in the way they can help each other.

I think perhaps I had better now give a few facts about our particular Club, and the way in which it is run.

It was opened five and a half years ago. A Blind man, having been sent to London for training, returned full of enthusiasm about a Club which the Blind had at Peckham. He was very anxious for us to start one also.

Up to that time we had always had an annual treat at which tea was provided—then an entertainment of some sort.

Comic songs and recitations were always to the fore in order that the ice might be broken. I don't know that the ice ever was broken to any great extent. Certainly it never disappeared.

Looking back on those days I have a horrid memory—of a collection of silent Blind people listening unmoved to the entertainment provided for them. Then, still silent, returning to their respective homes for another year.

Now, in contrast to those days, in order to gain a hearing it is necessary to rap on the table at the Club meetings, so loud is the buzz of talk.

Before the Club started we had begun to interest the Blind in each other, telling them something of what the others were doing. It was surprising at the time to note how much interest a Blind person would take in another known to him only by name, just because of this common bond of Blindness.

I suppose another reason for this interest in each other is to be found in their limited life and outlook. Unless they can finger-read they are so entirely dependent upon the small number of visitors they receive for their ordinary daily thoughts. It is from them they hear of anything going on in the outside world. Next to the loss of independence, lack of intercourse I think affects the Blind as seriously as anything, and that the Clubs are combating.

But to return to our Club. We rent a Mission Hall for one afternoon a month, the cost of which is defrayed by the local Blind Society. We provide tea, bread and butter and cakes, for which the Blind pay 2d. per head. A truly wonderful twopennyworth.

Singing, recitations, readings occupy the time before and after tea. The Club is open for two hours, after which the National Anthem is the signal for the meeting to disperse.

Originally we had a Roll Call immediately after tea so that the Blind could get to recognise one another's voices, but that is no longer necessary. Each member in turn would call out "Good afternoon everybody," and the company would name the speaker as quickly as possible, it being a point of honour that the members sitting next to the speaker should not name him.

We started by letting the Blind entertain one another, but after a while we found that the local talent was not quite enough and so got outside help, instrumentalists, singers, reciters, and so forth. Occasionally we still have an afternoon at which no outside help is given.

Two months after the Club had been opened a desire was expressed for more frequent meetings. So my friend and colleague started a weekly Singing Class with a membership of twelve, which has now risen to twenty-four. The members of this Class are mostly middle-aged people, and the oldest celebrated her 80th birthday some years ago, while until quite recently the youngest was over 40. So we have no very wonderful voices. But thanks to their teacher they have achieved some excellent musical results and sing quite charmingly.

On two occasions they entertained the Mothers' Meeting of the Parish in which our Club room is situated.

Last month they entertained a local Women's Institute. In return they are invited to tea in about ten days' time, when they will again sing, and hear the Women's Institute Choir sing, and compare achievements.

The members of the Singing Class are taught the music by ear, the words of the songs are written in Braille and formed into books.

In case anyone cares to see how these books are made I have brought a specimen which you can examine afterwards.

Manuscript copies of the songs are also written in books for the use of the Sighted on Club Days.

Here let me give you a word of warning. If you want copies for the Sighted, write them in large exercise books with brightly coloured backs. Number them, and keep a note of the people to whom they are lent. Our original books were small, and covered with whitey-brown paper, and people thought they were given them as mementoes. We possess seven copies to-day, thirty-six have been made! I don't know where the twenty-nine are.

Sometimes we play games. Clumps, How, when, and where? and Musical Parcels. This last is a near relative of Musical Chairs. Instead of walking round chairs to the accompaniment of music a parcel is handed round a circle of people. When the music stops the person holding the parcel at the moment is disqualified from further play, and leaves the circle. The game goes on until finally the last player keeps the parcel, containing some small trifle as a prize.

In the summer we have an outing. On the last Tuesday of this month for the fifth year in succession we are invited to a country house with a beautiful garden. We shall go in three large motor-coaches. There will be plenty of willing helpers from the village to escort the Blind round the garden, they will touch and smell the flowers and fruit. Then there will be a sumptuous tea under a wide awning. Songs afterwards by the Blind Choir. At the end of the afternoon each Blind person will be presented with a bunch of

sweet-smelling flowers, we shall join hands and sing "Auld Lang Syne." Then—we hope—we shall be invited for next year. After that the National Anthem, cheers and good-byes.

A few words about the results of the Club's work. I know that the Club means a great deal to our Blind, exactly how much it is beyond me to say.

It has brought many cases of Blindness to our notice. People who are not on the Register hear of our Club and ask if they may join as they cannot see.

It has given people courage. They have seen the bravery of those who have lost their sight.

Now may I give just a very few hints gleaned from our experience to those of you who have not yet started Clubs.

Get your Blind interested in one another as a foundation. Get them to feel they are members of a little set of people, not units.

Begin in a small way with an outing if you cannot have a Club just yet.

Get Guides, and Scouts, and Rangers, and Rotarians, and everybody you can to help you.

Interest everybody you come across in your individual Blind. Be human.

Let the aim of your Club be mutual help and friendly intercourse rather than entertainment.

Finally, I think it is well for us all to remember that we are not to fuss and not to worry. I used to worry terribly over the Club at first. It is not for us to decide where or why our work is to be done, but it is for each one of us to show ourselves "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed".

Miss Ainsworth then answered questions. She advocated clubs where men and women mixed. She deplored the necessity of giving a Braille lesson in a room where anything else was going on and said she always tried to get the pupil quite alone.

The Eastbourne Club closed from the end of July to the end of September, and this break was a good thing because the members came back fresh to the Club. The Club welcomed Blind visitors to Eastbourne.

After an interval for tea, which gave a valued opportunity for intercourse between the Home Teachers of different Counties and County Boroughs, an opportunity which we owed to the generous hospitality of the Clothworkers' Company, the Reverend Albert

Smith, Chaplain to the Royal Association in Aid of the Deaf and Dumb, a branch of which cares for the Blind-Deaf, addressed the meeting on the subject of

Work among the Blind-Deaf.

He said that the Royal Association approached the Deaf-Blind from the side of their deafness.

It is found that nerve tension must be very great in the case of those dependent on touch, taste, and smell for their contact with the great intellectual and social world around them. There is a danger of their becoming neurotic. Therefore those who try to help them must be unfailing in regularity. If anyone fails to keep an appointment, it seriously influences the health of blind-deaf persons. They are so thirsty for intercourse. If hope of it is raised and not realised, the disappointment is hard to bear. A woman with very little sight and no hearing watches for hours at the window-pane for the passing shadow of her visitor approaching.

He explained the methods of work adopted by the R.A.D.D. There were three great fields of work, industrial, social, and spiritual. Each case is treated individually. Those suspected of being blind are put in touch with the appropriate Blind Society, which arranges for examination of the eyes. The R.A.D.D. worker is generally obliged to accompany the applicant. In the area of the R.A.D.D., London and its environs, there are 200 Deaf-Blind who are registered Blind persons, but there is a large number whose sight is deficient to a crippling extent, especially owing to their accompanying deafness, who yet cannot be registered and receive the benefits of the Blind Persons Act.

The applicant is given instruction in the manual alphabet by the R.A.D.D. officer or deaf expert, and he is put in touch with the Chaplain of the local mission to the deaf. He is given the address of the R.A.D.D. worker, so that he may send for him at any time of need.

If his means are inadequate, his case is referred to the local Blind Society for relief under the Blind Persons Act or from voluntary sources.

If home surroundings are unsatisfactory, an attempt is made to arrange improved conditions. A man was living with a neurotic mother and a stepfather who did not understand or want him at all. A new home was found for him, where he is now very happy.

A trainable case is referred to the local Blind Society for training by the Local Authority. The Clapton Home for Deaf Women has been used for cases which have been refused or have failed to benefit at ordinary training institutions for the Blind, the R.A.D.D. if necessary bearing the expense.

Untrainable cases are taught pastime occupations by the Home Teachers (Home Visitors) of the Blind or, in cases of nervous or temperamental difficulty, by R.A.D.D. work teachers. Mr. Smith stressed the importance of providing occupation and means of service to others for those considered "unemployable". Even the worst work was used for something—very bad knitting used for lining coverlets or stuffing toys and balls—and so the worker felt his work was of use to someone.

Totally deaf cases are reported to local deaf missions to secure spiritual, social and recreative activities and facilities generally for contact with the outside world. Guides are provided if necessary. Mr. Smith emphasized the importance of the spiritual activities and pointed out that blind deaf persons with mental development equal with that of the blind or the hearing are grateful for interpretation in Church (Church for the Deaf) of sermon and lesson by ordinary deaf persons who have to translate the signs they see into words and whose language is often inadequate. They are able to pass on crumbs only and yet the blind-deaf are grateful and come. There have been as many as five blind-deaf to one service. The blind-deaf should be taken to whatever Church or Denomination they may belong. The R.A.D.D. is strongly Church of England, but it would help a blind-deaf person to get to any place of worship he desired. The blind deaf are capable of greater spiritual hunger than ordinary people.

A special weekly voluntary visitor is found for those needing one. The length of visit should not be less than an hour. The blind-deaf should be taken out for walks or drives. The visiting should be weekly or even more frequently. If not ministered to in this way by desirable people, they are likely to be taken up by less desirable people.

Social gatherings are arranged: Christmas parties, tea parties, summer outings, cars and guides being provided. Fare and transport are a great consideration, as also is the variety of temperament, circumstances, and attainment, so that social gathering is not always the most expedient method of bringing the blind-deaf together. It is found better to take the blind-deaf to general social gatherings than to gatherings of others similarly afflicted. But they enjoy a yearly blind-deaf party and they do like to know one another.

A fortnight's summer holiday ensuring change is most beneficial, but a difficult thing to arrange. On one occasion the R.A.D.D. booked two cubicles in a Home at St. Leonards for two months and kept them occupied by a blind-deaf and a guide who could finger-spell.

Gifts of fruit, biscuits, etc., are very welcome extras in the

Home or Institution. The funds for these are provided privately. In making presents, it had been found necessary to guard against injury to character by pauperisation, the hand stretched out to receive could so easily become the hand stretched out to beg. It is humiliating for a human being to be a receiver and not a giver. The blind-deaf should be encouraged to *give* in every way possible as well as to receive.

Mr. Smith was asked how a teacher should set about getting in touch with a blind-deaf person who cannot finger-spell, and he explained the beginnings of the manual alphabet. The next step is the spelling out of simple words, and so on. Concentration will be often found not to last more than five minutes or so at first, but to improve rapidly as the lessons proceed. In the particularly difficult case of a person who has never learnt to spell, resort must be had to feeling an object. One old woman who was blind and deaf from birth and had never learnt to spell, was given an egg to hold, and then the signs "e", "g", "g", were made on her hand. This was repeated over and over again until she associated the signs with the object felt. They succeeded in teaching her many simple words.

Some deaf-blind persons follow finger-spelling in extraordinary ways. Mr. Smith knew of an instance of four persons following one speller. The speller spelt on the hand of one. A second followed by a light touch on the back of the speller's hand. Two more bent their heads close over the hands and followed with the aid of a little sight. These four were prepared for Confirmation in this way.

Mr. Smith outlined the area covered by the R.A.D.D.,—to the border of Hertfordshire in the north, south to the Crystal Palace, west to Kingston-on-Thames, east to Erith—and said they had also centres in Colchester, Southend, Braintree, and Chelmsford, and intended to open others.

It was mentioned that the relatives of blind-deaf persons often would not bother to learn finger-spelling, but instead traced letters with the finger of the blind-deaf person.

Mr. Offord, for over thirty years Home Teacher in the Colchester area of Essex, eloquently proposed a vote of thanks to the three speakers.

Mr. Ward, London Home Visitor, another senior member of the profession, moved a vote of thanks to the Chairman and the Clothworkers' Company for their kindness and hospitality. Both votes were carried with acclamation.

The Chairman with a few remarks in acknowledgment closed the meeting.



